

District, union reach tentative agreement on salaries

Cancellation of legislature's special session creates complications

The School Board and the Alachua County Education Association (ACEA) have reached tentative agreement on a new salary/benefits package for teachers and ESPs, but the actual size of employee raises will depend on the actions of lawmakers in Tallahassee.

Under the agreement signed by representatives of both the board and ACEA, the district will spend at least \$5.2 million more on salaries and benefits this year than last year. Another \$3.5 million may be added depending on what the Florida Legislature decides to do about the state's looming fiscal crisis.

Legislators were scheduled to begin meeting on September 18 for a special session on Florida's budget problems. However, they've now announced that they are postponing the session, and as of the printing of this issue of the *Express*, a new date for a special session has not yet been set.

In the meantime, the state is requiring all districts to set aside money in anticipation of a holdback—that is, in case the state decides to hold back some of the money that was originally intended for schools. Alachua County was required to hold back \$3.9 million.

The district and the union have agreed that if the final holdback ends up being less than the \$3.9 million, 91.8% of the difference will be added to the salary/benefits package for teachers and ESPs. In other words, if the district is allowed to keep the entire amount, more than \$3.5 million will be divided among those employee groups, bringing the total increase in salaries and benefits for the year to nearly \$8.8 million. If the district is forced to

give up the entire holdback amount, nothing will be added to the already agreed-upon \$5.2 million increase.

“Our goal is to provide significant raises to our employees, and the \$5.2 million is certainly significant considering the current budget situation,” said Superintendent Dan Boyd. “We would like to add even more to the package, but we're at the mercy of the legislature right now.”

The possibility that the special session might take longer than expected was discussed during negotiations. Both sides agreed that if such a situation occurred, they would make plans to go ahead and distribute the \$5.2 million in raises and then distribute whatever portion of the shortfall amount was left later on, after the legislative session was over. District officials say that is what they plan to do now that the session has been postponed indefinitely.

“We'd like to get as much of the money into employees' hands as soon as possible,” said Joan Longstreth, assistant superintendent for human resources. “We don't want to have to wait too long while the legislature decides what to do.”

Representatives of the School Board and the union will be meeting to discuss how to distribute the money throughout the salary schedules and to work on some outstanding contract language issues. Employees will then have an opportunity to vote on the proposed contract. The results of the employee vote will be shared with the School Board, which must also approve the contract.

Updates on employee contracts will be provided in upcoming issues of the *Express*.

Open enrollment for insurance/benefits begins October 1

The open enrollment period for health insurance and other benefits runs this year from October 1-31.* Employees will be receiving packets with more information in late September, and information sessions will be held in October at locations throughout the district. A schedule will be included in the packet but is also provided below. Employees will be seen on a first come, first served basis and should bring their inventory sheet to the session.

Location	Room	Date	Time
Kirby-Smith Center	Board Room	Wednesday, Oct. 3	9:30 -- 11:30 a.m.
Sivia Center	TBA	Tuesday, Oct. 9	7:30 a.m. -- noon
Kirby-Smith Center	Board Room	Wednesday, Oct. 10	2:00 -- 4:30 p.m.
Gainesville High School	Auditorium	Thursday, Oct. 11	2:15 – 4:30 p.m.
Transportation	Training Portable	Monday, Oct. 15	7:30 a.m. – noon
Newberry High School	Media Center	Tuesday, Oct. 16	2:15 – 4:30 p.m.
Kirby-Smith Center	Board Room	Wednesday, Oct. 17	8:30 – 10:30 a.m.
Eastside High School	Media Center	Thursday, Oct. 18	2:15 – 4:30 p.m.
Hawthorne Middle/High	Auditorium	Tuesday, Oct. 23	1:45 – 4:00 p.m.
Kirby-Smith Center	Board Room	Wednesday, Oct. 24	2:00 – 4:30 p.m.
Santa Fe High School	Auditorium	Thursday, Oct. 25	2:30 – 4:30 p.m.
Kirby-Smith Center	Board Room	Friday, Oct. 26	9:30 – 11:30 a.m.
Kirby-Smith Center	Sub Training Room (West Wing, 2 nd Floor)	Friday, Oct. 26	2:30 – 4:30 p.m.
Buchholz High School	Auditorium	Tuesday, Oct. 30	2:15 – 4:30 p.m.
Kirby-Smith Center	Board Room	Wednesday, Oct. 31	1:00 – 4:30 p.m.

****Employees are reminded that this is a ‘change only’ enrollment. Those who are not making changes to their current benefits package do not need to fill out any forms. Be sure to review the materials you’ll be receiving at your school/worksite for more information.***